



## INTERAGENCY CONNECTION

### Chair's Corner



We are quickly approaching the end of the fiscal year and now we look toward 2017!

I had the honor of attending the Federal Executive Board (FEB) **Strategic and Operational meeting** in Washington, DC in August. Since the meetings were in the

Eisenhower Executive Office building, we heard from numerous White House staff and various Department Executives. Topics included:

- Senior Executive Service initiatives to increase the recruiting and retention of the SES ranks,
- US Office of Personnel Management priorities and initiatives,
- Federal Cybersecurity Workforce Strategy,
- Sustainability initiatives of the EPA that may include FEBs,
- FEMAs "America's Preparathon!" initiative, and
- Information on Medical Countermeasures.

Our last day of meetings included a long lunch so that we could tour the East Wing of the White House.

Each FEB Chair was recognized by an Executive Staff member of OPM.

I enjoyed the opportunity to network



Veronica Villalobos and Timothy Jeffcoat

with fellow FEB Chairpersons, share best practices, learn what they were doing and share what we are doing in Houston.



*FEB Chairpersons*

We have many things coming up (most have registrations available in this newsletter):

- Our 2016 Leadership FEB class will continue through December.
- Active Shooter Tabletop Exercise September 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Houston FEB luncheon October 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss FY17 initiatives
- Federal Labor Relations Authority Training on November 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Financial Wellness Workshop on November 3<sup>rd</sup>

Our FEB is gaining momentum and I want to thank you for your support. Contact me anytime at [timothy.jeffcoat@sba.gov](mailto:timothy.jeffcoat@sba.gov) with ideas or suggestions for your FEB!

Tim Jeffcoat, Chairman

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## **The fight for your TSP account continues**

The Department of Labor recently enacted a rule requiring that “advisers”—meaning investment and insurance sales people—who offer “advice” to participants about their retirement accounts act as fiduciaries and accept the responsibility and liability that goes along with that role.

In simple terms, this means that anyone who tells you to do something—anything—with your Thrift Savings Plan money, is obligated to put your interests ahead of all others. This poses a rather unpleasant problem for the “financial services” industry, which has built a massive profit generating machine upon a foundation that includes, as its cornerstone, an almost complete lack of accountability for quality or results.

Challenges to the new rule were being formulated even before the final decision to enact it had been announced. A group of financial industry firms and their agents have filed a suit in federal court to block enforcement of the rule on the basis that the DOL does not have the necessary authority to have imposed it in the first place. I’m not going to waste your time by arguing over the details of the rule, or its validity or enforceability. I’ll leave that to the lawyers, the courts and of course, the lobbyists. Instead, I want to make sure all TSP participants understand the sides in this fight and the reasons for their passion for fighting.

On one side of the rule, we have disinterested fiduciaries, like the DOL. They have a mission to help protect labor—that is the people who work for their living and are trying to build some financial security. They are passionate about protecting the interests of labor against threats that might try to abuse them.

On the other side of the rule are the

profiteers who pose the threat to the interests of labor that the DOL is worried about.

These are salespeople, agents, and the organizations that they represent, who thrive by finding ways to separate retirement savers, like TSP participants, from as much of their nest eggs as possible. Sometimes this is accomplished by violating the rules, but usually it is easily accomplished within the rules.

The problem with the current system—the one without uniform application of fiduciary standards for all financial advice—is that it’s very difficult to know who and when to trust. Registered investment advisers are held to a fiduciary standard of care, while insurance agents, salespeople and other intermediaries are not. But, any or all of these people may offer financial or investment advice. Combine this complexity in the financial advice landscape with concepts, products, opportunities and risks that are beyond the clear understanding of most victims, and you have set the stage for financial slaughter.

As a TSP investor, let the continuing fight over the DOL’s fiduciary rule—a rule intended to protect and help TSP investors—remind you to be careful. Be skeptical. Withhold your trust until you are sure. Don’t act—particularly when it comes to taking money from your TSP account—until you know exactly who you are dealing with, how they are paid, whether they may have any conflict with your interests and how much it will cost. If the financial services industry is successful in their challenge, you’ll be the only help you’ve got.

*Taken from Federal Times, June 2016 article written by Mike Miles, Certified Financial Planner licensee and principal adviser for Variplan, LLC.*

*Successful Leadership is defined by what you do when things Stink*

7 WAYS TO SNIFF THE STINK

Success hinges on dealing with things others turn from. Plug your nose when something stinks, if you want to fail.

1. Ignore anger.
2. Reject worry. Tell yourself everything will work out on it's own.
3. Medicate organizational anxiety.
4. Dance around challenges.
5. Discuss comfortable topics – avoid uncomfortable.
6. Affirm the mediocre.
7. Tolerate backstabbers.

The way you deal with stink determines:

1. The height of your reach.
2. The usefulness of your influence.
3. The effectiveness of your leadership.

Start sniffing when something doesn't smell right. Breathe deep. Don't plug your nose.

*7 ways to sniff the stink:*

1. Stay curious when curiosity feels awkward. "I'm wondering about..."
2. Bring together gratitude and dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is
3. Don't be happy all the time. You should feel bad when things are bad. Just don't wallow. Unhappiness instigates change.
4. Be optimistic. "I think we could do better."
5. Declare the pain. "This hurts."
6. Pick the scab. "What makes you think things will be different next time."

7. Confront negative patterns. "This isn't working. What needs to change?"

*Subtle stink – 4 things lesser leaders ignore:*

1. Meetings that should be 45 rather than 60 minutes long.
2. Talented people who wing it rather than prepare.
3. The third conversation about the same issue.
4. Bullies and backstabbers who deliver results.



**Successful leaders lean in when others lean away.**

Ease is the enemy of excellence. A little comfort strengthens. Constant comfort makes babies of us all.

*5 essentials when sniffing stink:*

1. Show some frustration. If things aren't right, let it be known. Don't blow up. Speak up.
2. Embrace dissatisfaction.
3. Resolve to make things better. If you aren't committed to improve, just plug your nose.
4. Know where you're going. Get clear on what "better" looks like.
5. Believe in the power of hard work.

The tipping point in your leadership is what you do when something stinks.

Taken from Leadership Freak blog:

<https://leadershipfreak.wordpress.com/2016/06/30/7-ways-to-sniff-the-stink/>

## TO COACH OR KICK BUTT

<https://leadershipfreak.wordpress.com/2016/07/09/solution-saturday-to-coach-or-kick-butt/>

What do you do when the person you're coaching persists in poor performance or negative behaviors?

Energy deflates when you have the same conversation over and over.

The belief that coaching is handholding offends real coaches.

It's not compassionate to create dependency.

It's disrespectful to enable helplessness.

It's ineffective to tolerate persistent failure.

### 7 ways to coach and kick butt:

Technically, coachees kick their own butts.

**#1. Sincere people get stuck.** We've all circled the black hole, from time to time. Compassion enables high standards.

**#2. Don't have the same conversation** – in the same way – for the third time. The same conversation for the third time insults competence. Talking about the same thing – in the same way – validates weakness and affirms failure.

**#3. Point out the obvious.** Look them in the eye and say, "This isn't working. This is the third time we're talking about this issue, but you aren't getting where you want to go. What do you think?"

**#4. Choose silence** after stating the obvious. Silence is communication.

#### 5 Powers of awkward silence:

1. Silence says this matters. Blabbing suggests frivolity. Silence indicates that this topic is worthy of careful consideration.
2. Silence says we aren't moving to the next item.
3. Silence is space to reflect, rethink, and face

reality.

4. Silence shifts responsibility. As long as you're speaking, they don't have to. Don't rescue someone who knows how to swim.
5. Silence waits for their solutions. You aren't the solution fairy.

### **#5. Display authenticity, compassion, and candor.**

- Avoid saying the "correct" things.
- Don't judge.
- Own your disappointments, frustrations, and aspirations.
- In awkward moments, let people know where you're at. Don't keep them guessing.



**#6. Explore the challenge.** "What's the real challenge for you?" Ask this question three or four times, in different ways.

- And what else?
- Tell me more.
- I hear you saying .... So, what else might be the real challenge for you?
- What's coming to mind? (This question lets people know their response doesn't have to be well thought out.)

Michael Bungay Stanier correctly observes that the words "for you," change everything.

### **#7. Choose a challenge and chart a path.**

- Which of the challenges seems most important?
- What would you like to do about that?
- What else would you like to do about that? (Create options before making choices.)
- What makes you think things will be different this time? (The answer concerns behaviors.)
- What new behaviors are necessary? When someone is stuck, working harder in the same way makes things worse.
- What do you want me to ask you next time?

## These Things Will Make You Much Happier

There's enough advice on *happiness* floating around out there to make your head spin. Yet, this is understandable, as everyone is different. What makes one person happy might make another miserable.

In the face of so much contradictory, and often subjective, advice, what are you supposed to do if you want to live a happier life? Just forget about all that subjective advice and focus your energy and attention on science-proven facts.

UCLA neuroscience researcher Alex Korb has spent a great deal of time studying the effects of different happiness strategies on the brain. His findings have a lot to teach us about what actually works when it comes to boosting happiness.

Korb's research demonstrated that your thoughts—and the emotions you feel in response to those thoughts—have a profound impact on surprising areas of your brain.

Guilt and shame, for example, activate the brain's reward center, which explains why we have such a strong tendency to heap guilt and shame upon ourselves. Likewise, worrying increases activity in the prefrontal cortex (the rational brain), which is why worrying can make you feel more in control than doing nothing at all.

***Gratitude creates happiness.*** I'm not advocating worry, guilt, and shame as the path to happiness. The illustration shows why we tend to succumb to thoughts that fuel these emotions. The real neural antidepressant is gratitude. Gratitude boosts levels of serotonin and dopamine—the brain's happy chemicals and the same chemicals targeted by antidepressant medications. The striking thing about gratitude is that it can work even when things aren't going well for you. That's because you don't actually have to feel spontaneous gratitude in order to produce

chemical changes in your brain; you just have to force yourself to think about something in your life that you appreciate. This train of thought activates your brain to make you feel happier.

***Labeling negative feelings dilutes their power.*** There is an amazing amount of power in simply labeling your negative emotions. In one study, participants underwent fMRI scans of their brains while they labeled negative emotions. When they named these emotions, the brain's prefrontal cortex took over and the amygdala (where emotions are generated) calmed down. This effect doesn't just work with your own emotions; labeling the emotions of other people calms them down

too, which is why FBI hostage negotiators frequently rely on this technique.

***"Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions." – Dalai Lama***

***Making decisions feels good.*** Similar to naming emotions, making decisions engages the prefrontal cortex, which calms the amygdala and the rest of the limbic system. The key is to make a "good enough" decision. Trying to make the perfect decision causes stress. We've always known that, but now there's scientific research that explains why. Making a "good enough" decision activates the dorsolateral prefrontal areas of the brain, calming emotions down and helping you feel more in control. Trying to make a perfect decision, on the other hand, ramps up ventromedial frontal activity—which basically means your emotions get overly involved in the decision-making process.

***It helps you to lend a hand.*** Taking the time to help your colleagues not only makes them happy but also makes you happy. Helping other people gives you a surge of oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine, all of which create good feelings. In a Harvard study, employees who helped others were 10 times more likely to be focused at work and 40% more likely to get a promotion. The same study showed that



### **These Things Will Make You Much Happier**

people who consistently provided social support to others were the most likely to be happy during times of high stress. As long as you make certain that you aren't overcommitting yourself, helping others is sure to have a positive influence on your happiness.

***Our brains are wired for touch.*** Humans are social animals, to the point that our brains react to social exclusion in the same way that they react to physical pain, with activity in the anterior cingulate and insula. Similarly, our brains are hardwired to interpret touch as social acceptance. Touch is one of the primary stimuli for releasing oxytocin, which calms the amygdala and, in turn, calms emotions. There are even studies that show that holding hands with a loved one actually reduces the brain's response to pain. You might think that's bad news for people who are socially isolated, but studies show that a massage increases serotonin by as much as 30%. Touch reduces stress hormones, decreases the perception of pain, improves sleep, and reduces fatigue.

### **Bringing It All Together**

Kolb's research highlights just how amazing the brain is, and he summarized his findings succinctly when he said, "Everything is interconnected. Gratitude improves sleep. Sleep reduces pain. Reduced pain improves your mood. Improved mood reduces anxiety, which improves focus and planning. Focus and planning help with decision-making. Decision-making further reduces anxiety and improves enjoyment. Enjoyment gives you more to be grateful for, which keeps that loop of the upward spiral going. Enjoyment makes it more likely you'll exercise and be social, which, in turn, makes you happier."

*Written by Dr. Travis Bradberry, Coauthor Emotional Intelligence 2.0 & President at TalentSmart*

### **Delegation: Master this vital skill**

#### **Here's a short list of reasonable assignments**

Your ability to delegate responsibility properly is crucial to your future as a manager. If you delegate too little and try to do everything yourself, you'll burn out and fail. If you try to delegate too much and push everything off on your employees, they'll hate you for it and you'll fail.

The first step to successful delegation is deciding what kind of work you should delegate to others.

Here's a short list of reasonable assignments:

- Tasks or jobs that are closely related to the work the employee is already doing. Ask yourself: Will the new work be a good fit with what the individual is doing right now? Or is it something that is completely different?
- Projects with clearly defined end results. Don't delegate work to someone if neither of you knows what the end result should look like.
- Work that allows employees to learn and grow. Employees don't necessarily have to be experts at the tasks you assign them. Sometimes the best kind of work to delegate is something that will challenge employees and help them develop new skills.
- Jobs at which an employee is more skilled than you. For example, are you wasting a lot of time proofreading copy—despite the fact that one of your employees is better at it than you and has more time to do it?

Of course, knowing what not to delegate is just as important as knowing what to hand off. You should keep the following items on your own plate:

- Long-term planning and goal setting. This is the job of the manager. You can ask for input from your employees, but in the end, you are the one responsible for these.
- Any kind of crisis. Some managers like to "delegate" responsibility during a crisis so they can also pass the buck if things don't work out. When trouble arises, be prepared to step up and make decisions.
- Important decisions. Some managers like to pass off important decisions to avoid making the decision themselves. Employees will see this for exactly what it is: ducking, not delegating.

Taken from:

[http://www.managebetter.biz/Main/Articles/30136.aspx?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Savicom&utm\\_campaign=1466436615.62579&utm\\_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.managebetter.biz%2FMain%2FArticles%2F30136.aspx](http://www.managebetter.biz/Main/Articles/30136.aspx?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Savicom&utm_campaign=1466436615.62579&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.managebetter.biz%2FMain%2FArticles%2F30136.aspx)

## TSP Plan Advantages Over Private Sector Plans

The Thrift Savings Plan has many advantages over similar retirement plans outside of the government; this article will look at some of them.

THE TSP'S EXPENSES ARE RIDICULOUSLY LOW. I will periodically give classes in federal retirement and benefits to financial planners who want to understand our benefits so that they can better serve federal clients. When I inform them of how low the TSP's expenses are, they don't want to believe it. For the year 2015, the expense ratio for the TSP was 2.9 basis points – that's \$0.29 in expenses for each \$1,000 you have in your TSP account. You will not find such low expenses in private sector retirement plans, IRAs or annuities. There are several reasons that the expenses are so low, they are:

NUMBER ONE: As an in-house retirement plan, the TSP doesn't have a "retail" operation, this lowers expenses considerably because of limited advertising. Even Vanguard, known for low fees, has a retail operation and engages in advertising to attract customers. Read any magazine on popular finance (e.g., Money, etc.) and you will find advertisements from Vanguard and other brokerage houses.

In contrast, the biggest publicity push the TSP has had in the last five years was for the introduction of the Roth option in 2012. The TSP's "advertising" consisted of including a one page (printed on both sides) flyer with a mailing that was already going out to all TSP participants. The additional sheet of paper did not cause the envelope to weigh over one ounce, so there wasn't even any extra postage. That's beyond frugal.



NUMBER TWO: The TSP's investment options are primarily broad-based index funds that have little in the way of trading expenses.

NUMBER THREE: There are mechanisms within the TSP to reduce fund expenses. You may be aware that any federal employee who leaves federal employment before three years are up has to forfeit the 1% agency automatic contribution that Uncle Sam has been making to their account. It is required that these forfeited monies be used to reduce TSP expenses.

If you have taken out a TSP loan over the last ten years, you have had to pay a \$50 application fee. Money collected in application fees is used to reduce TSP expenses.

NUMBER FOUR: The staff of the TSP is modestly compensated compared to the staffs of brokerage firms. Greg Long, the Director of the TSP makes more money than anyone who is reading this article right now. Abby Johnson, the head of Fidelity Investments, makes more money than everyone who has read this article today – combined.

Twenty percent of employer sponsored defined contribution retirement plans in the private sector do not have matching contributions at all. The most common match in a private sector plan is a three percent match of fifty cents on the dollar. So in your average private sector plan you have to put in 6% to get 3%, while in the TSP if you put in 5% you get 5%.

There are more TSP advantages that we will be looking at in future articles.

Taken from FedWeek article By: John Grobe, Federal Career Experts, *Published: July 25, 2016*



## Houston Federal Executive Board And the Federal Labor Relations Authority

### *Training on the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute*

Date:	Wednesday, November 2, 2016
Time:	8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Location:	Leland Building, 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room 1919 Smith Street, Houston, OK
Offered by:	Federal Labor Relations Authority, Office of the General Counsel Dallas Regional Office

#### **What will this training cover?**

This course offers a broad overview of federal-sector labor law. Topics include: the duty to bargain in good faith, including the *de minimis* and "covered by" doctrines, and substantive versus impact and implementation bargaining; meetings, including formal discussions, bypasses, and investigatory examinations (or Weingarten meetings); interference with statutory rights and discrimination based on protected activity; bars to filing ULP charges, such as timeliness and prior grievances; and information requests.

#### **Who should attend this training?**

Union representatives – officers and stewards – and agency representatives – from first-line supervisor to agency head. If you are involved in labor-relations at your agency, this training will provide an overview of your rights and responsibilities under the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute.

#### **How do I sign up?**

Room capacity is 75; when registrations reach 75, this event will be closed.

Go to the FLRA website and sign up here:






<https://www.flra.gov/resources-training/training/upcoming-flra-training>





## Houston FEB presents: Financial Wellness Workshop



Date:	Thursday, November 3, 2016
Time:	9:00 a.m. - Noon
Location:	Alliance Tower 12 <sup>th</sup> Floor Room 1250-1, 8701 S. Gessner Road Houston, TX 77074
Why?	With Federal salaries not keeping up with the cost of living, it is more important than ever for federal employees to be equipped with information on how to maximize their incomes.
Topics:	<div>  <p>How Money Works – basic fundamentals you were definitely never meant to “know”</p> </div> <div> <p>Debt Solutions – alleviate unnecessary stress of too much month and not enough money</p>  </div> <div>  <p>Software &amp; Apps – tools to assist you in tracking expenditures, calculate interest on loans and keep you on track for “paying on time”</p> </div> <div> <p>Retirement Planning – protecting your money and never running out</p>  </div> <div>  <p>Long-Term Care – fastest growing need of people over 50</p> </div>
Instructor:	Jarad Gray, Primerica, SEC & FINRA registered

Quote from a participant:

*“In our Financial Wellness Workshop, we got a lot of great ideas that everyone should be doing but nobody teaches us. Eric helped lay it out in a way that we could see exactly what was important for us to do right now and what to focus on down the road.” Nichole*

### Registration

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Mail registration to:	Houston Federal Executive Board 2320 La Branch St., Rm 1107 Houston, TX 77004
Email to:	<a href="mailto:Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov">Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov</a>

*Cancellation Policy: Understanding that unforeseen circumstances may preclude an individual from attending, cancellations will be permitted through October 28, 2016. Since this is a “no-cost” training, we ask your courtesy to cancel early so that we can accommodate people on the waiting list, if one exists.*



## Registration for Interagency Intergovernmental Table Top \*\*Active Shooter Scenario \*\*



This event is an interagency intergovernmental planning effort that includes the Federal Executive Board and FEMA. This exercise is for government leaders (federal, state, local) to discuss issues necessary to provide effective planning to increase the safety of our workforce and an opportunity to share lessons learned and best practices. Your agency's participation in this exercise is very important. We ask that only a couple of organizational leaders attend from each organization. There will be no After Action Report generated through the tabletop, rather a "self-evaluation" for the participants that can serve as a foundation for reviewing, updating, and continuing to improve relevant policies, plans, and/or procedures that will continue to build your organization's readiness.

<b>Date:</b>	Friday, September 2, 2016
<b>Time:</b>	7:30 a.m. Registration – 8:00 a.m. Start Time End Time scheduled for 3:00 p.m.
<b>Location:</b>	U.S. Coast Guard, 13411 Hillard St., Houston, TX 77034
<b>Who Should Attend?</b>	Agency Leaders, Emergency Coordinator and/or Facilities Manager
<b>Cost:</b>	No Fee

**Agency:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Agency Leader (or designee) to attend:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Spelling for name tent

**Position Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fax:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Emergency Coordinator, Facility Manager or Other to accompany Agency Leader:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name/Title Email Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name/Title Email Address

<i>Please mail to:</i>	<i>Houston Federal Executive Board 2320 La Branch St, Rm 1107 Houston, TX 77004-1032</i>
<i>Or Fax to:</i>	<i>713-425-2440</i>
<i>Or email to:</i>	<i>Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov</i>

*Cancellation Policy: In consideration of those planning this event, we ask that registered participants attend. Understanding that unforeseen circumstances may preclude an individual from attending, substitutions will be permitted through August 26, 2016.*



## HOUSTON F.E.B. MEETING

Date:	Thursday, October 20, 2016
Location:	Mickey Leland Federal Building, 1919 Smith St., Houston, TX, 77002 Bayou Room (10 <sup>th</sup> Floor) Right off of Hwy 45                      Downtown
Time:	1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.
Cost:	\$5.00

**Who should attend?** Federal Leaders in Houston

FEB Meeting: Networking of Greater Houston area Federal Leaders. Speaking will be Mr. Karl Brooks with the LBJ Executive Master's Public Leadership.

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### REGISTRATION

Name:	Agency:
Phone:	Address:
Email:	

**Cost: \$5.00**

### Lunch Menu

*Cookies, Sweet Breads and Bottled Water*

Method of payment:    ☐ Check                      ☐ Credit Card    (ph# to call for credit card info)

(\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_\_

Mail registration to:	Houston Federal Executive Board 2320 La Branch St. Room # 1107 Houston, TX, 77004
Or email to:	Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov

Cancellation Policy: Understanding that unforeseen circumstances may preclude an individual from attending, refunds and cancellations will be permitted through October 14, 2016. However, after that date, registrations must be honored by the individual or agency involved. If you are unable to attend, substitute attendees are authorized and encouraged if within the appropriate management structure!